

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ARAE-00 DHA-02 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00
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O R 031723Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2472
INFO AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
AMEMBASSY SANJOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 MANAGUA 1032

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, NU
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES WITH PRESIDENT SOMOZA CATHOLIC
CHURCH'S CHARGES OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

REF: (A) MANAGUA 1009 (NOTAL, (B) MANAGUA 0836 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: AMBASSADOR MET WITH PRESIDENT SOMOZA ON MARCH 2ND
TO EXPRESS DEEPENING CONCERN OVER NEW CHARGES OF AMERICAN CAPUCHIN
PRIESTS OF RECENT MASSACRES OF CAMPESINOS BY NATIONAL GUARD NORTH
OF MATAGALPA. PRESIDENT SOMOZA CATEGORICALLY DENIED ACCUSATIONS
AND CLAIMED THAT FALSE INFORMATION BEING GIVEN TO CAPUCHINS AS
PART OF FSLN-COMMUNIST EFFORT TO DISCREDIT GON. SOMOZA ADMITTED
THAT INNOCENT BY-STANDERS, INCLUDING WOMEN AND CHILDREN, SOMETIMES
HAD BEEN KILLED IN NATIONAL GUARD-FSLN GUERRILLA CROSS FIRE,
ESPECIALLY EARLY 1976. GON PLANNED REPLY TO NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE
MARCH 2ND ON CATHOLIC CHURCH'S ALLEGATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES.
SOMOZA CLAIMED THAT ADMINISTRATION'S PUBLIC CRITICISM AND PRES-
SURE REGARDING HUMAN RIGHTS PERFORMANCE OF FRIENDLY COUNTRIES
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WILL ENCOURAGE TERRORISM, ALIENATE FRIENDLY GOVERNMENTS,
AND ADVERSELY AFFECT BROADER U.S. INTERESTS, AS DEMONSTRATED BY
ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING MEETING WITH PRESIDENT SOMOZA IN HIS OFFICE AFTERNOON
MARCH 2, 1977, AMBASSADOR VOICED HIS DEEPENING CONCERN ABOUT NEW
CHARGES BY AMERICAN CAPUCHIN PRIESTS OF ALLEGED RECENT MASSACRES

OF 86 CAMPESINOS BY NATIONAL GUARD IN TWO SEPARATE INCIDENTS IN AREA NORTHEAST OF MATAGALPA (SEE REFTEL A). HE POINTED OUT THAT PUBLICATION OF CAPUCHIN ALLEGATIONS AND CATHOLIC BISHOPS' ACCUSATIONS OF CONTINUING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES ON FRONT PAGE OF MARCH 2ND NEW YORK TIMES WOULD LIKELY CREATE STRONG, UNFAVORABLE IMPRESSION ON AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION, PARTICULARLY IN NEWS MEDIA, CHURCH CIRCLES AND U.S. CONGRESS. AMBASSADOR STATED THAT CAPUCHIN PRIESTS AND CATHOLIC BISHOPS ARE USUALLY RELIABLE AND CREDIBLE SOURCE OF INFORMATION. THEREFORE, IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO DISMISS THEM LIGHTLY AS INNOCENT DUPES OF FSLN-COMMUNIST INSPIRED MANEUVER AGAINST GON. PRESIDENT SOMOZA WAS TOLD FORCEFULLY AND AT SOME LENGTH THAT THESE CHARGES BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH WERE OF THE UTMOST SERIOUSNESS AND THREATENED TO PLACE A HEAVY BURDEN ON OUR TRADITIONAL FRIENDLY RELATIONS UNLESS THEY COULD BE SATISFACTORILY ANSWERED BY HIS GOVERNMENT.

2. THE PRESIDENT REPLIED BY CATEGORICALLY DENYING THAT THE ALLEGED MASSACRES HAD TAKEN PLACE. HE SAID THAT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO COVER UP SUCH INCIDENTS AND FOR THE NAMES OF THE PERSONS ALLEGEDLY KILLED NOT TO BE KNOWN. HE ADDED THAT HE WAS WAITING FOR THE CAPUCHIN PRIESTS TO PRODUCE THE NAMES OF THOSE ALLEGEDLY MASSACRED, WHICH THEY HAVE NOT DONE SO FAR. SOMOZA STATED THAT HE WAS VERY MUCH AWARE OF WHAT WAS PRODUCTIVE AND COUNTERPRODUCTIVE IN COUNTER-INSURGENCY OPERATIONS. HE KNEW THAT NOTHING COULD BE MORE SELF-DEFEATING THAN FOR THE GON TO ENCOURAGE OR CONDONE SUCH ACTS AGAINST INNOCENT CAMPESINOS. IT IS NOT, AND NEVER HAS BEEN, GON POLICY TO MASSACRE CAMPESINOS. SOMOZA SAID THAT HE BELIEVED THAT THE CAPUCHINS HAD BEEN DELIBERATELY MISINFORMED BY FSLN COLLABORATORS AS PART OF WIDER DESIGN TO DISCREDIT AND OVERTHROW HIS GOVERNMENT.

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3. UNDER FURTHER QUESTIONING, SOMOZA ADMITTED THAT SOME INNOCENT WOMEN AND CHILDREN HAD BEEN KILLED IN THE PAST IN NATIONAL GUARD CROSS FIRE WITH FSLN GUERRILLAS IN NORTH. HE SAID THAT FSLN GUERRILLAS OFTEN TAKE REFUGE IN CAMPESINO HUTS WITH CAMPESINO FAMILIES. SOMETIMES THEY ARE DISCOVERED BY NATIONAL GUARD UNITS AND A FIREFIGHT ENSUES. THE NATIONAL GUARD HAS NO WAY OF KNOWING THAT WOMEN OR CHILDREN ARE PRESENT. SOMOZA SAID THAT THE TRAGIC DEATHS OF INNOCENT CAMPESINOS IS ONE OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE GUERRILLA STRUGGLE WHICH SHOULD BE BLAMED ON THE FSLN AND NOT THE GON. ACCORDING TO SOMOZA, IN EARLY 1976 AN ESTIMATED 450 FSLN GUERRILLAS WERE ACTIVE IN THE RIO BLANCO AREA WHERE THEY CONTROLLED AN AREA WITH ABOUT 15,000 CAMPESINOS. IT REQUIRED ENORMOUS SACRIFICES ON THE PART OF THE NATIONAL GUARD AND THE GON TO PACIFY THIS AREA. SOMOZA ADDED THAT MANY GON OFFICIALS, CIVILIAN AND MILITARY, LOST THEIR LIVES IN THIS STRUGGLE, ALONG WITH THE FSLN GUERRILLAS AND CAMPESINOS CAUGHT IN THE CROSS FIRE.

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4. AMBASSADOR QUESTIONED THE PRESIDENT CONCERNING GON PLANS TO DEAL WITH ACCUSATIONS OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS AND CAPUCHIN PRIESTS AND STRESSED THE DESIRABILITY OF COMPLETE INVESTIGATION, PREFERABLY AN IMPARTIAL ONE. SOMOZA REPLIED THAT THE GON WAS PREPARING AN ANSWER TO NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE WHICH HE WAS SENDING TO EDITOR OF THE TIMES. HE SAID HE WOULD GIVE THE EMBASSY A COPY AS SOON AS IT WAS COMPLETED.

5. PRESIDENT ENDED CONVERSATION WITH COMMENT THAT THE ADMINISTRATION'S SUPPORT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS WAS ACCEPTABLE IF NOT PUSHED WITH EXCESSIVE ZEAL. HE SAID THAT PUBLIC CRITICISM AND PRESSURE REGARDING HUMAN RIGHTS CONDUCT OF FRIENDLY GOVERNMENTS WOULD LEAD TO THEIR ALIENATION, ENCOURAGE INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM BY RAISING HOPES, AND ADVERSELY AFFECT U.S. COMMERCIAL AND STRATEGIC INTERESTS. SOMOZA POINTED TO UNDERSTANDABLY HOSTILE ARGENTINE RESPONSE TO CUTBACK IN FMS CREDIT SINCE NO COUNTRY, EVEN ONE FRIENDLY TO THE UNITED STATES, COULD PASSIVELY ACCEPT PUBLIC ADMONITION AND PUNITIVE ACTS.

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6. COMMENT: PRESIDENT SOMOZA SEEMED DISTURBED BY IMPLICATIONS OF

ADMINISTRATION'S HUMAN RIGHTS POLICIES AND EXPECTS RENEWED EFFORTS BY FSLN, COMMUNISTS AND CUBA TO MOUNT AN ANTI-SOMOZA CAMPAIGN IN THE UNITED STATES, TIED TO HUMAN RIGHTS THEME. HE IS CONVINCED THAN ANTI-SOMOZA OPPOSITION, IN PARTICULAR PEDRO JOAQUIN CHAMORRO, IS ASSISTING THIS EFFORT. HE GAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT HE IS RESIGNED TO STEPPED UP ANTI-SOMOZA CAMPAIGN AT HOME AND ABROAD. DESPITE AMBASSADOR'S INSISTENCE ON DESIRABILITY OF FULL GON INVESTIGATION OF CHARGES OF BISHOPS AND CAPUCHINS, THE PRESIDENT SHOWED LITTLE INTEREST AND GON APPARENTLY PLANS ONLY REPLY TO NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE.

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Message Attributes

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